



**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS**

DIVERSE LEARNEERS

SEGMENT #1: DIFFERENTIATION



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Professional Development Toolkit for New and Beginning Teachers



The PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS is a research-based video streamed program with accompanying resource documents. The program is an outgrowth of a previous Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) online mentoring study at Virginia Commonwealth University. The findings of the online mentoring study revealed twelve topics new and beginning teachers felt additional university training would have led them to more effective use of best practices in the classroom. In this program, each of the twelve topics is presented in two to six stand alone video segments. The total number of segments is forty five. Suggested uses, in addition to personal viewing by K-12 teachers for self improvement, include professional development, mentor and mentee, university prospective teacher, and small or large group training.

The facilitators are university faculty and practitioners with field experience. Each is currently involved in teacher training or serves as a staff development administrator. All are currently engaged in educational research, teaching and/or educational policy development.

The teachers in the video programs are classroom teachers. Some of them were participants in the 2006 Online Mentoring Study in which the topics for this project were identified. They represent all disciplines in K-12 grades.

Resource documents for the programs are provided as PDF files to facilitate the use of the 45 video segments. The first set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) an introduction to program facilitators, including a definition of each topic, and a list of the video segments, and (3) a research formative study summary that helped to guide the project's development. The second set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) a full text transcript for each video segment, (3) a set of problems and solutions related to each video segment in the form of a work-study guide, and (4) an annotated bibliographic summary of references and Internet links for each transcript. Many of the organizations and agencies referenced in the transcripts are actively involved in the development of video and professional development presentations that support policy and advocacy.

Every reasonable effort is made to present current and accurate information. Internet content, however, does appear, disappear and change over time. CEPI, as a university-based educational policy research institute endorses no specific position of any listed group.

ROADBLOCKS

SEGMENT #1: DIFFERENTIATION

VIDEO SEGMENT TRANSCRIPT

Diverse Learners: Knowledge and understanding of exceptional students, their differences and the teaching approaches required to provide differentiated instruction.

Facilitator: Dr. [Joan Rhodes](#), Assistant Professor
Department of Teaching and Learning
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Virginia Commonwealth University

AUDIO	VIDEO
<p>According to the Center for Applied Special Technology, from pre-kindergarten to college, classrooms usually include learners with diverse abilities and backgrounds, including students with differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds, physical, sensory, and learning disabilities, students who are gifted as well as many others. Educational researchers, Kay Brimrimijoin and James Alouf, note one of the most complex challenges in teacher education is preparing new educators to meet the needs of a diverse student population. The increase in student diversity and increased emphasis on standards and accountability dramatize the need for new teachers to build expertise in differentiating instruction for their students.</p> <p>My name is Joan Rhodes. I am a professor in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. Today I would like to share best practices for working with the diverse learners in your classroom. In this segment we will specifically talk about differentiation in instructional settings.</p> <p>Carol Tomlinson defines differentiated instruction in her book, <i>How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms</i> as instruction that provides students with different avenues to acquiring content and to process, construct, or make sense of ideas. Differentiated instruction requires educators to develop teaching products that allow all students within a classroom to learn effectively, regardless of differences in ability.</p> <p>Since the mid-1980's educational research has noted several practices that are central to differentiating instruction. They include using effective classroom management procedures, grouping students for instruction and engaging learners. (These practices are described fully within other videos in this series.)</p> <p>Prior to planning differentiated instruction for students with diverse abilities, a teacher needs to diagnose their differences in readiness, ability, interests and learning style.</p>	<p>DR. RHODES</p>

This can be achieved through observation, interviews and assessment of all the students in her classroom.

The information gained from collecting data and reviewing student records are used to develop lessons that meet the needs of each learner. One process for meeting the challenge of diversity, Universal Design for Learning, suggests that teachers design their lessons from the outset to meet the needs of the greatest number of students. Using UDL, teachers provide flexible instructional materials, techniques and strategies that meet the varied needs of their students. Teachers provide options for students by:

- Presenting their content and instructional information in different ways
- Allowing students to express what they know in multiple ways
- Stimulating student motivation and interest in the subject they are studying

When teachers plan lessons from the beginning with the needs of all students in mind, they reduce the need for reteaching and after-the-fact lesson modification.

Assessment, observation and records review are all important first steps in identifying students that may need support in a classroom. Consultation with specialists within the school can provide suggestions for instruction.

Let's hear from some of our new teachers about their experiences with identifying and planning for students who may need differentiated instruction in their classrooms.

My name is Christina Stewart and I am a 6th grade Exceptional Education teacher at L. Douglas Wilder Middle School. This is my third year of teaching. The first thing I like to do is get to know my students and their interests. Once I gather that information I incorporate their interests into my lesson plans. For example, my students listen to Hip-Hop Music. After introducing figurative language to my students, I pulled Hip-Hop lyrics and showed them how the artist used figurative language. I also like to get flexible group work where students are with a variety of peers over a period of days. This allows students to work with others that have similar interests and similar learning styles. Lastly, I include learning styles in my lessons. I try to have my students complete assignments that encompass all learning styles.

**CHRISTINA
STEWART**

My name is Gina Brooks. I teach English and reading in a middle school. I have been teaching for almost 3 years. I knew when I came to the classroom that students are individuals and, when possible, should be receive individualized instruction. And, over the past three years, this has been reinforced in my mind time and time again. It is a challenge in a class of 20 or more students to teach each individually. But there are opportunities to recognize individuality in unique ways. I do it when I prepare seatwork and assignments, I do it when I make personal comments as my students enter and leave my classroom, and I do it as I move around the classroom to provide individual assistance. Most students have ways of showing that they appreciate personal help.

GINA BROOKS

We can see from our teacher's examples that they are behaving in very culturally responsive ways. By valuing their students and organizing instruction to meet individual needs they are ensuring student success.

DR. RHODES

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Diverse Learners: Knowledge and understanding of exceptional students, their differences and the teaching approaches required to provide differentiated instruction.

Ask yourself: What do you use to meet the needs of diverse learners in your classroom? How do you differentiate tasks in your classroom?

Suggested use for this module:

1. Analyze:

Please select one of the scenarios below and problem-solve a list of possible solutions. Record your ideas in the space provided. Discuss these ideas with your other educators (mentor, colleagues, or other beginning teachers).

2. View:

Watch the corresponding video on this topic. How does this information change your ideas?

3. Compare:

Revisit the scenario selected. Next, review the section entitled, "Possible Solutions" comparing the ideas listed with your own list.

4. Reflect:

How will you apply this new information to your current or future classroom? What goal will you set to help you begin to change your practices? What support is needed to help you accomplish this goal?

5. Apply:

List the first step towards change below. Create a timeline for success and place deadlines in your personal planner as a reminder. How will you know when you have met your goals?

Scenarios 1 & 2: Diverse Learners

Scenario 1:

All the students in second grade have the same spelling list (List 3). After the pretest on Monday, the classroom teacher realizes that the list of words was not appropriate for most of the children in the class. Many students had already mastered the words and received a score of 100%. Other students were totally frustrated by the list and unable to spell any of the words. How could this teacher differentiate this task to be more appropriate for all of the students?

Scenario 2:

A middle-school teacher uses whole group instruction everyday to teach his students algebra. He feels uncertain about changing his routine for fear of behavior problems if he tries cooperative learning activities. What could he try to differentiate his learning format? Where should he begin?

Circle the scenario that you selected below:

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Record a list of your own possible solutions here:

Summary & Goal Setting:

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their teaching approach and how they adjust and present the curriculum. Differentiation also requires thoughtful teacher presentation of the information to learners rather than expecting students to modify the curriculum. Consider student differences and incorporate techniques into your lessons while planning rather than waiting to modify the materials after the lesson has been created. Think about changing either your learning process and/or the student products which are generated to add variety to your lesson plans.

Begin by asking yourself the following questions:

- How will you structure the lesson to meet the needs of students you expect to have difficulties? What supports will you build into your lesson plan?

- How will you structure the lesson to meet the needs of students you know will master the concepts fairly quickly or already know the information presented in the lesson?
- What will you do to keep early finishers (individual students or groups) engaged in instruction?

It can sometimes feel overwhelming to try to differentiate everything in your classroom. Not everything needs to be adjusted or differentiated. Start small by incorporating one or two strategies which will improve your lessons. As you experience success, increase the options that you try with students.

1. Begin with what is essential for learning. What key elements are required for students to be successful with your lesson? 2. Next, consider adjusting the learning process or product within your lesson.

Consider the following options:

- Routines and Formats (Teacher uses a variety of formats during instruction including individual work, partner activities, small group instruction, cooperative learning activities, and whole class instruction)
- Type of Task (Incorporate more authentic and meaningful work assignments versus using worksheets or skill and drill reproducible)
- Stations or Centers (Allow students to rotate to different area of the room and complete problem-solving or hands-on tasks. Once routines have been established, begin working with small groups or conferencing with individual students)
- Create learning scenarios which require students to utilize real-life objects or apply content knowledge to solve everyday problems. Incorporate opportunities for students to research and investigate topics of interest.
- Use activities which are leveled or have different tiers or choices depending on student needs or interests (learning contracts are a helpful tool for managing choices).
- Give interest assessments which help you identify student academic and recreational interests and learning styles. Try to include different learning modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) into your lessons.
- Do you always assess students in the same way? Why not vary the type of assessment you use. Could students create a graphic organizer, write a letter, or complete a project to demonstrate the depth of their learning?
- Conduct diagnostic assessments to build student growth across time. For example, a reading or spelling inventory will ensure that all learners are in materials at the appropriate level (independent or instructional) rather than working at a frustration level.
- Are you relying too much on the same materials? Don't rely solely on the textbooks. Use literature or trade books, source documents, current events, websites, and songs to promote greater learning.

- Encourage more high-level thinking. Without proper planning, many beginning teachers rely on 'spur of the moment' questions or examples. Use Bloom's Taxonomy to generate questions which require more depth of thinking. Record a couple of questions and examples that students will relate to and place these on index cards next to your teaching location. Access this information periodically during the lesson to keep your expectations high.

ANNOTATED RESEARCH AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ❖ One of the most complex challenges in teacher education and professional development is preparing novices and mentor teachers to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Increasing student diversity, coupled with an emphasis on standards and accountability, has dramatized the need to build expertise in differentiating curriculum and instruction for preservice and inservice teachers.

Brimmijoin, Kay. & Alouf, James. (2003). *New dimensions for building expertise in mentoring and differentiation*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No ED 472630)

- ❖ The model of differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjusting the curriculum. It also requires presentation of information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum.

Hall, Tracey. (2002). *Differentiated instruction*. Retrieved September 22, 2007, from http://www.cast.org/publications/ncac/ncac_diffinstruc.html

- ❖ Practices noted as central to differentiation have been validated in the effective teaching research conducted from the mid 1980s to the present. These practices include effective management procedures, grouping students for instruction, and engaging learners.

Hall, Tracey. (2002). *Differentiated instruction*. Retrieved September 22, 2007, from http://www.cast.org/publications/ncac/ncac_diffinstruc.html

- ❖ Key elements guide differentiation in the education environment: Content (what a teacher plans to teach), Process (how a teacher plans instruction), and Products (teacher assessment of content).

Differentiated instruction at Memorial Middle School. (n.d.). Retrieved September 22, 2007, from <http://beverlyschools.org/memorial/di/diinfo.htm>

- ❖ Teachers who differentiate instruction focus on their role as coach or mentor, and give students as much responsibility for learning as they can handle. These teachers grow in their ability to (1) assess student readiness through a variety of means, (2) "read" and interpret student clues about learning needs and preferences, (3) create a variety of ways students can gather information and ideas, (4) develop varied ways students can explore and "own" ideas, and (5) present varied channels through which students can express and expand understanding.

The Role of the teacher in a differentiated classroom. (2007). Retrieved September 22, 2007, from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200710161050.html>

- ❖ Differentiating instruction is an essential tool for integrating technology into classroom activities.

Differentiating instruction. (2004). Retrieved September 22, 2007, from <http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiatinglinks.html>

- ❖ In preparation for differentiation, the teacher diagnoses the difference in readiness, interests, and learning style of all students in the class, through use of a variety of performance indicators.

Differentiating instruction. (2004). Retrieved September 22, 2007, from
<http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiatinglinks.html>

- ❖ The effect of teacher beliefs and perceptions influences the teacher's academic expectations of students with varying academic abilities.

Ehlers, Kristy. & Montgomery, Diane. (1999). *Teachers perceptions of curriculum modifications for students who are gifted.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 429750)

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Tomlinson, C.A. (1995). *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms.* Retrieved September 22, 2007, from http://www.cast.org/publications/ncac/ncac_diffinstruc.html